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BACCALAUREATE SERMON,

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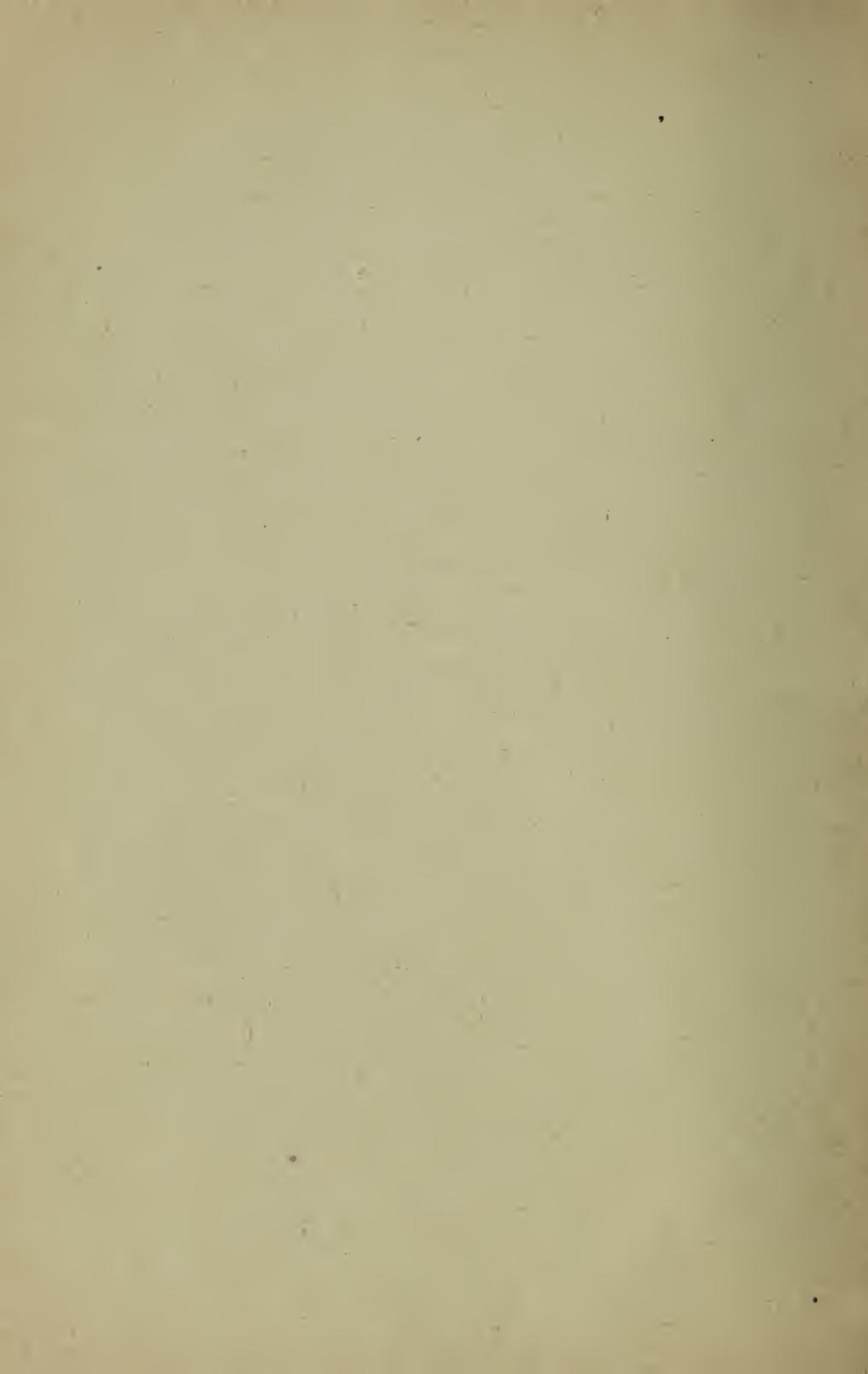
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II THESSALONIANS 2:10.

*"THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH, THAT
THEY MIGHT BE SAVED."*

In every age and in every clime the question has been asked "What is Man's Highest Good?" Thoughtful and earnest minds have wondered what the consummation of human possibility might be.

The world's teachers have given widely differing answers. Buddha has said Rest, cessation from all life's labors by absorption of the individual in the Eternal Spirit of Peace. Mohammed has said Activity, the activity of feasting and continual ministration to the desires of the flesh. Closely allied to Buddha is every teacher, who proclaiming materialism makes the last possibility of human life extinction, and closely allied to Mohammed is every teacher who announces an Elysium, a Valhalla, a Happy Hunting Ground as the ideal existence that man may expect.

Other teachers have made man's highest good something in the line of individual character. Confucius did, as he predicted a life beyond the present in which a man's own moral nature would be his joy or his sorrow. Socrates too left the world his testimony that man had something within him that could not die, but would move on, in a realm of its own, carrying with it its own atmosphere and purposes, of good or of evil.

22 Feb. 18 Edmund J. James

However large and inviting these wise men made the possibility of human good, that good was so qualified by uncertainty and by inadequate views of character that it was disappointing and insufficient to those who dreamed dreams of light without shadow and life without an element of decay. Such minds needed another answer to satisfy their ideals, an answer so great that they could say, "We can ask no more, we have heard of the highest good beyond which it is impossible for us even to dream."

There came a time when that answer was given. It came to men as the breaking of day comes to the earth. Slowly and out of the darkness there appeared the shimmering of an idea, an idea of faultless approach to and communion with Perfection. A people set apart for this very purpose shot up rays of light through Patriarch and Prophet, through Tabernacle and Temple, until the idea almost reached its dawn. Then, as in an instant the day at last breaks and the sun is risen, there came the answer, and in one single word, the word "Salvation," spoken by Jesus of Nazareth, the highest good of man was set before the world. This word he declared was the final expression of the possibilities of man. Here was the ultimate privilege, the most ennobling inspiration, the crown of human life.

The teacher of Nazareth used the word salvation in a full and comprehensive sense. He was on earth to save men's *lives*. Their lives meant their whole being, their complete selves, with all that they could lose or gain, in time and in eternity. Their pains and their pleasures, their perils and their possibilities, their losses and their opportunities were all in his mind when he made the end and joy of his mission to save men.

Viewed simply as a matter of *deliverance*, viewed negatively, Salvation opened a vista of immense privilege.

Wherever men have thought and have expressed their thought it has been evident that they recognized a two-fold bondage that held them and held their fellows—a bondage to the *penalties of* wrong and to the *inclinations to* wrong. The penalties of sin; the hurtful, self-perpetuating, debasing penalties are sure and terrible. Sin is to our moral nature what leprosy is to our physical nature, it interpenetrates, it weakens, it poisons, it destroys. Its work cannot be described otherwise than by figures of speech. The very Son of Heaven could not tell men what hurt it worked out save as he spoke symbolically of “the worm that never dieth” and “the fire that is unquenched.” His whole being shrank back from any such misuse of life as sin brought about. The havoc wrought to man’s possibilities was to Him terrible beyond language to indicate.

Others not having Christ’s conception of moral completeness have used his words so inadequately as to belittle their force. It means nothing, absolutely nothing to many minds to have the penalty of sin described by physical screams and the anguish of bodily torture. A promised deliverance from such makes no special appeal to us. But the deliverance promised by Christ, a deliverance from all disorder of soul, from all meanness, trickery, lowness, selfishness, impurity, dishonesty, greed, hypocrisy, with their attendant evils, that—that is a deliverance which is sublime.

And the deliverance from the *inclination* towards evil, from all its relish and all its love, is likewise sublime. Noble minds are distressed because of the inclination so often asserting itself to be sordid, covetous, unloving,

unholy. It was the cry of a brave, self-denying hero, "Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" as he felt the workings in himself of a tendency, a trend to do what was low and weak. "What would I not give if I could be free from all propensity to wrong!" has been the expression of men whose stainless outward life was beautiful to the world's eye.

Salvation then as a promise of mere rescue, a deliverance from the effects and the tendencies of evil is such a good as might well stimulate the human heart with cheer and content.

But the meaning of Salvation is merely *suggested* by the negative idea of deliverance. Christ's power and grandeur lay in his affirmations. The invalid is free from disease and now he can fill his heart with laughter, the prisoner is free from captivity and now he can gladden home and hearth with his labors of love. "Bird, you are free," we say to the cageling whose wires are broken. "Go, soar! Away to the sunlight, the fields, the streams, the flowers. Spread, spread your wings and *fly*." Salvation is opportunity — it is possibility of growth into likeness to God Himself, it is such possibility for an eternity. No one has ever conceived what the outcome of this possibility will be. We can today but touch the outer fringes of the idea. What will it be when all the powers of our life, moral and intellectual, social and spiritual, have settled into perfectly harmonious movement, when every part answers to its end, when every abiding element of character shall be started in its path of endless progress, when new fields of thought, meditation, labor shall open before us and every faculty shall meet the opportunity in the freshness and vigour of eternal youth! All language grows dumb before the idea. Christ suggested

no word for it but Life—Perfect Life, with no tendency to weariness or decay, but rather with an immortal energy that moves on as the very Purpose of God moves on, to a higher, ever higher, wider, larger possibility and development.

This then is Salvation, Man's Highest Good. Have I not said well, that more than this man cannot dream?

Happy, happy the man that by sovereign Creatorship is brought into a world admitting of such a consummation. To be born is not to be born in vain when *salvation* can be expected.

But how is this Highest Good to be secured? What is the process, the means by which we come to it? In a few brief words the answer is given—through Love of Truth, an answer that sums up for all men and for all time the method of salvation.

Truth! What is Truth? Pilate, like many another whose life is unreal has doubted if there was Truth. Truth! It has seemed to many at the best the baseless fabric of a dream, a will o' the wish perhaps, that constantly invites and constantly baffles the earnest soul. How it is laughed about, how its very existence is denied!

And still it *is*. It is the real. It is that which actually is. There may be much in our world that seems, that appears to be. But back of all that seems, that appears, back of the deceptive, the temporary, the evanescent, there is the real and the real is the true. The truth in any given matter is the reality in that matter.

Truth thus may be the very opposite of *public opinion* whether that opinion comes down to us accredited by the traditions of past ages, or dazzles us as the fashionable belief of the present hour. It may be at variance with the *sentiment of the wisest and best* individuals whom we know. It may be different from our own *conceptions*,

however strong and well grounded they are -- nay, it may be different from our very *convictions* though those convictions have cost us much and are so dear to us that for them and by them we would sacrifice life itself.

That man is a Truth-seeker who in any sphere of investigation whether it be the sphere of physical science, or political economy, or social ethics, or business enterprise, will surrender and pass by everything that *seems* in his indomitable search for what *is*.

In the special sphere of religious investigation truth is the actual, the real with reference to the meaning of life, the purpose and the end of our being, what we are and what we may become. The love of any kind of truth leads us to integrity in the sphere of that truth. The love of religious truth, teaching us how to live in the higher, nobler elements of being, leads to integrity, wholeness, completeness in the sphere of religious truth, and that completeness is Salvation.

For love of truth involves (1) a desire to know truth (2) a search to find truth (3) a purpose to live by truth.

A deep seated, abiding *desire to know truth* is in itself ennobling. When once it takes possession of the heart, the heart is aroused from cowardice, indolence, habit, imitation. Timid minds dread to plunge into investigations of moral truth. Indolent minds are satisfied with their own conceptions and do not wish to be disturbed in opinions long held and now become a portion of themselves. There is not a nature with the least tendency to what men call the conservative and the safe, that is not in danger of laziness, if not of arrogance. Desire to know truth keeps a man forever on the alert and makes him feel that however much he may have learned, there is infinitely more yet to be learned. The world stands still scientifically when chemists, astronomers, electricians are satis-

fied with what they have heard and seen. No new elements are brought to light, no Copernican theory corrects and overthrows the theory of Ptolomey, no cable obliterates time and space with the flash of its passing message. And the world stands still intellectually and morally when men are so content, be the reason what it may, with what they now think, that they do not care to know more, that they are actually willing to be ignorant of truth.

I count that man a man of heroic qualities who will stand by his beliefs so long as they mean truth to him, though he must die to be faithful to them, and will surrender those same beliefs the instant he is convinced they are not the truth, though that surrender means the giving up of the dearest theories of his life. Truth is indeed a very precious thing to him who will adhere to the system that expresses it, though social ostracism and ecclesiastical calumny are ready to crush him, and who will withdraw from the system that expresses falsehood and not truth, though his name in an instant becomes a byword and a hissing. Honest, earnest desire to know truth bespeaks a purposeful soul. Those who rushing headlong into every new devicee claim that they are actuated by desire to know truth, deceive neither themselves nor others. They know too well, they learn quite soon enough, that every new appearance is not reality. Desire to know truth is not their actuating motive. They are content with the seeming, the unreal, the disappointing. The life that really desires truth has taken into itself a seeing eye and a hearing ear. Mere bubbles are not long beheld as solid substances by it, nor are Sirens voices long considered as the call of duty. Such a life has lain aside dull sloth, and has lain aside fearfulness, and self-sufficiency, too, as it wishes, in its inmost heart—Oh, that I knew the truth!

The love of truth necessitates a *search to find it.* It

never has lain so clear before any man's feet that he did not have to hunt for it. Bread is intended for all men, but it is bread to be discovered in the kernel of the wheat and thence evolved by processes which stimulate human industry and skill. Truth is meant for all men, but men's minds are to be invigorated and their whole being aroused into energy by the search for it, the effort to comprehend it. It takes penetration to see the loaf of bread in the kernel of wheat: it takes penetration to see the true meaning of things.

Besides, the truth of to-day is never quite the same truth in all its proportions and in all its relations, to-morrow. Mount Blanc is always the same—and still it is never the same to the traveller who sees it to-day from the north and to-morrow from the south, at one hour at its base and at another hour from the distance. We grow older, we move on into new circumstances and into new experiences, our horizon changes, our view-point alters, we cannot see truth as it actually is in any *new* day unless we search for it as it is in *that* day. The great God is the same for ever and ever—but He is never the same to the man who searches for Him. He is never meant to be the same. He is meant to be an ever new revelation, and unless he is an ever new revelation, He fades away from vision altogether.

Men, therefore, are to be kept always on the march in searching for truth. There is a sense in which no truth is settled once and forever for any man excepting the essential axioms of duty. There is another sense in which truths are settled sufficiently for progress so that we rest upon what we have found up to date, as when crossing a stream we plant our feet on different stones as far as we have come and so have something under us, but we press on and must press on, for we have not reached the end

yet. This is not our Rest; we must move forward.

To some the necessity of this unremitting search for truth is a fascination. Men have said that they enjoyed the searching for it more than the finding of it. It was their mistake to say this. That was to make the excitement of running for the physician more than the health obtained by finding the physician.

But to most of us there is a shrinking from this constant inquiry and this unceasing movement of mind. We want to stand still, and not think and not question. It is enough, we say, that we have learned what we have; the vision satisfies us; let us stay in the land of the Lotus eaters and be quiet and restful.

And still how much better it is that as yet the best and brightest of us know but in part, that there is undiscovered country still ahead of us, that limitless expanses of fact still await our footsteps and that truth secured is only an earnest of abundant truth still to be gained. Who that has found truth and has obtained ideas of life which correspond with the reality of things does not rejoice that the search is not over, that all is not found, but that every day there shall be a new advance, a new conquest and a new joy, to him who follows whithersoever truth leads!

And the love of truth includes also a *purpose to live by it*. Truth is an end as well as a means. As a means it calls us, attracts us; as an end it desires to become a very portion of ourselves. When it is taken into our life so that it moulds and controls our views and conduct, it puts within us the elements of genuineness. To love truth for truth's sake is not to love truth for truth's end. Truth is not satisfied when the drunkard knows the worth and praises the beauty of sobriety while he himself is intemperate. Truth calls no one her lover who believes

it well to appear as an angel of light, but who still holds fast to a dark, a satanic heart. Truth is very jealous of her own mission to man's character. She will have man true to truth, else man shall be incapacitated for finding truth at all. She will not be sported with. She will not stay with him who does not live what he has so far recognized as true. Right thinking will stop as soon as right living stops. To know more truth than we endeavor to fulfill is to dim our vision to the beholding of further truth; nay more, it is to become blind to the very truth we once recognized. We cannot feel its force, we cannot long recognize its worth and be sensitive to its beauty.

The legend of the Holy Grail is in point here. The cup that the Hero of the Ages held, and from which he drank before he passed to the scene of his triumph and coronation on Calvary, could not be found save by him who was pure and holy. Let the knight who would obtain the Grail be spotless. It was folly for the unchaste to seek the Grail. It would never allow itself to be even touched by his hand. And let the life that would *find* the *truth* be a true life and the life that would *keep* the truth be a true life also, for truth does not believe that any soul cares for her who does not take her *to* his heart and hold her *in* his heart.

To love truth is to desire, to seek, to live truth.

Consider now the attitude of mind into which love of truth puts one. How eager it is for light upon life, how it inquires what is best and surest, how it appropriates, as the body appropriates food, every principle that appeals to sense of right! Will that soul make no mistake? It may make many and great mistakes. It may be led into what you and I call egregious error. This condition of mind may send the fakir of India a thousand miles which he measures day after day by the length of

his prostrate body on the ground until he can reach the sacred Ganges and bathe therein to be clean from sin. It may make a man shout the shout of the dervish until he sinks from exhaustion and becomes the confirmed paralytic. It may lead him to be the inquisitor who will drive women and children to a death of disgrace and torment. It may cause him to sacrifice his every physical virtue as he endeavors to be true to what he understands to be the truth. But whatever it leads him to, there is something noble, grand, heroic in his truth to truth for character's sake — and he, rag-covered and dirt-besmirched if you please, puts to shame the elegant idler, the careless trifler, be he spotless in robes and gold, because he so infinitely transcends him in moral purpose. And we may be sure that beside him such an idler is the merest chaff in the unerring judgment of the omniscient and almighty God.

Given such an attitude of mind and then let the same opportunity be granted to see and hear and feel the Christ that Paul had, and it will be inevitable (if the time be sufficient) that the soul will receive and rejoice in Christ. There will be a correspondence between such a love of truth and Christ himself. As the needle veers to the pole, the lover of Truth will veer toward Christ. Christ's words will be seen to show forth principles, ideas, facts as they *are*. His teachings will be found to be basal teachings, lying at the very foundation of things, a support on which any life, any institution, any society may build with absolute assurance of stability. His example will approve itself as showing forth the ideal manner of life, an example that followed must secure integrity, beauty, peace, strength and holiness. In a word the lover of Truth will see in Christ the true Teacher, the true Master, the true Redeemer, the true Friend. Christ will become to him the embodiment, the expression of the

truth that he loves. He will put himself at His feet to be taught of Him.

But even then the quest for truth will not be over. It will simply have its direction shaped. In the ways and words of Christ there will be something new to be learned unceasingly. Each year, each month new phases of His truth will open. He will continue to grow larger, and ever there will be a greater Christ and ever there will be a greater soul, and this will always be so long as the Infinite is to be studied and the soul of man grows with the advancing comprehension of the Infinite.

The chaos of human life largely disappears in view of Man's Highest Good and the method of attaining it through Love of Truth. Life ceases to be enveloped in mystery. The rightness, the fullness, the opportunity of life assume form. The problem of finding the complete and exact truth does not cease to be most great, but the value of living faithful to what truth we have discovered assumes new proportions. The search for *all* truth is never to stop. Forever and forever man is to travel on in the realms of the new, the fresh, the exhilarating as he advances in his search of *all* truth. He is never to be satisfied with what he has found. The future will ever beckon him on and hope and purpose with all their attendant joys will always abide with him. Eternal life means eternal energy, eternal development, eternal delight, in this search for Truth. No man can over estimate the reward that awaits the soul surrendered to the love of *all* truth.

And no man can over-estimate the reward that attends him who is consecrated to the living of *any* truth and of *every* truth *already found*. He may think that he has found but very little. It may seem to him that the truth he knows is but a mere nothing. But let him cling to it,

cherish it, keep it — living that truth — if it be no more than the truth of kindness and honesty and reverence — and he will find that that truth is enough to lead on to the purification of his soul, enough to work changes in his character that have the promise and the potency of endless good.

In this world of ours there is one thing that cannot be shaken or injured. No man, no devil can hurt Truth, because Truth is the Real, and the Real is the ever abiding *is*. He that is on the side of Truth is on the side of the unconquerable, the indestructible. Truth cannot die. It is idle, it is foolish to attempt to defend the truth with indignant feelings and bitter words. Truth will stand unmoved, and it is ours to take our tone from Truth's immobility and be calm whatever assaults are made upon Truth. Happy the man that realizes that as no one can save truth no one can destroy truth, and realizing this, sees to it that as he hopes to live a successful life he makes Truth his friend and ally. How would the rampant words of those who hate truth die away if their speakers were only wise and understood ! And how would every individual forsake all artifices, all insincerities, hypocricies, deceptions, and cry out for truth in the inward parts and truth in ever fibre of his life, if he were only wise ! How, too, would everyone who had one feeling of responsiveness to truth, one emotion stirred, one pity aroused, one high sentiment evoked, transmute that feeling into immediate action and make that truth his own forever, make himself Truth, if he were wise ! Men are ruined by falsehood ; they are saved by Truth — and saved to a salvation which in the gracious love of Heaven means Deliverance from every bondage of wrong, and Opportunity, full, boundless and eternal for growth into the very mind and joy and nature of the ever Blessed God.

Members of the Graduating Classes: As I look into your faces and understand the import of this hour I am moved with a great tenderness of Spirit. For you and I are not strangers but friends. Many a time we have touched hands and many a time we have touched hearts. I have for you individually great regard and great affection. Wherever you may go in the future, you will always have the invisible but the actual presence of my fond wish beside you. I have watched your course of study here with unceasing and eager interest. I have lifted many a prayer to Heaven for each one of you. I have asked God to lead you and keep you and use you as shall be best for your highest welfare and for the world's widest good. May He answer my many prayers abundantly above all that I have hoped.

Today the message of Life's greatest Possibility has been set before you. May the vision of this Highest Good never be absent from your thought. Live for this noblest and grandest of possibilities. Never be discouraged or depressed because the fulfilment of the vision tarries. Never be enticed from it by the allurements of the unreal. Keep the eye upon the vision and press forward. If you love truth love it so that your thoughts, your feelings, your words, your deeds are true, so that *you* are true. Then you will be honest, earnest, meek, brave, pure and kindly. You will be drawn closer and closer to Christ. He will be your Pattern, your Inspiration, your Hope. May this be! And then sometime may there come a converging of your earthpaths and mine until at last we find ourselves together once again, and we are forever in the Presence of the Living and the True God.

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